

CLARENCE E. MULFORD'S

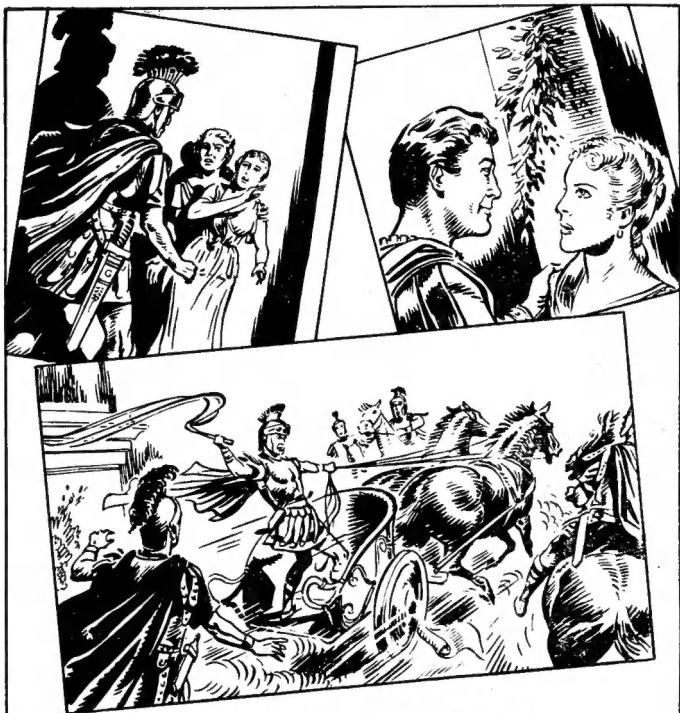
THRILLER  
COMICS  
No 17

# *The* **OUTLAW ORPHAN**

**8<sup>D</sup>**

**A RIP-ROARING  
DRAMA OF THE  
OLD WEST TOLD  
IN 64 PAGES  
OF THRILLING  
PICTURES**





SOME DRAMATIC INCIDENTS FROM  
THRILLER COMICS No. 19,

## **QUO VADIS**

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# *The* **OUTLAW ORPHAN**

By  
*Clarence E. Mulford*

## **Chapter 1. THE MAKING OF AN OUTLAW**

THE STORY OF THE ORPHAN, OUTLAW AND GUNMAN, BEGAN WHEN A FAMILY NAMED GORDON MOVED INTO NORTH-WEST TEXAS. THEY BROUGHT A HERD OF TWO HUNDRED CATTLE AND A FEW HORSES AND THEY PUT UP A SHACK ON A PIECE OF LAND WHICH THE FATHER BOUGHT FROM A NEARBY RANCH--



THE LITTLE RANCH PROSPERED, FOR THE BOUNDARY ON TWO SIDES WAS A FAIR-SIZED STREAM WHICH NEVER RAN DRY. AND SOON THE CATTLE WITH GORDON'S GRIDIRON BRAND SPREAD OVER THE PLAIN ~~~

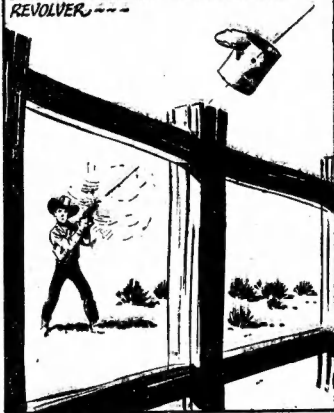
A GRAND SIGHT, EH, BOY? AND ALL DONE WITH OUR OWN SWEAT AND TOIL!



THE BOY LIVED HAPPILY. HIS FATHER HAD BROUGHT MANY BOOKS WITH HIM AND HE SAW THAT HIS SON WAS WELL EDUCATED.



BUT WHILE HIS MIND WAS ENRICHED, THE BOY ALSO LED AN OUTDOOR LIFE, AND HE BECAME A DEAD SHOT WITH RIFLE AND REVOLVER. ~~~



BUT WHEN THE BOY WAS TEN, THE NEIGHBOURING OWNER OF THE BIG RANCH DIED -- AND HIS HEIRS, WHO WERE NOT SO SQUARE AND HONEST, BEGAN TO GET AN ITCH FOR THE RICH GORDON LAND. THEY KNEW HE HAD NEVER BOTHERED TO SIGN DEEDS. TROUBLE BEGAN AND GORDON LOST CATTLE ~~~

GIT ALONG THERE, DOGIES! YOU BELONG TO US NOW!



THE BIG RANCH BRAND WAS A GRIDIRON CIRCLE, AND IT WAS LITTLE TROUBLE TO CHANGE THE BRANDS. THE GRIDIRON CIRCLE GANG CLAIMED GORDON HAD JUMPED THE RANGE, ALTHOUGH HE HAD PAID GOOD MONEY FOR HIS LAND AND HAD IMPROVED IT. IN THAT WILD, LONELY COUNTRY HE WAS VERY MUCH ALONE IN HIS FIGHT. BUT HE HELD HIS OWN UNTIL ONE DAY, OUT LOOKING FOR A VEIN OF COAL WHICH HE BELIEVED LAY ON HIS LAND -- HE FOUND INSTEAD -- SILVER!

THIS IS BETTER THAN COAL, LAD! IF I KNOW ANYTHING, THIS IS SILVER ORE! THE ASSAY OFFICE WILL PROVE ME RIGHT!

THAT'S DANDY, DAD! WE'LL BE RICH! WE'LL BE ABLE TO HIRE PLENTY OF GOOD HANDS TO HELP US FIGHT THOSE GRIDIRON CIRCLE SKUNKS!



THE NEWS SPREAD --



THE GRIDIRON CIRCLE PUNCHERS STEPPED UP THEIR WAR AGAINST GORDON, AND ONE DAY HE CAUGHT SOME OF THEM ON HIS RANGE ---

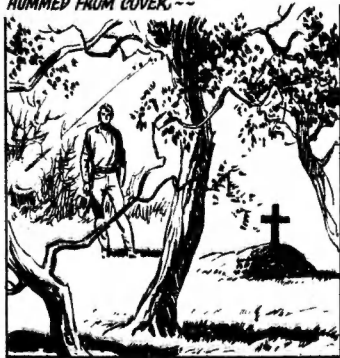


THE RANCHER'S GUNS ROARED IN VENGEANCE ---

NOW GET BACK ON  
YOUR OWN RANGE --  
IF YOU CAN  
CRAWL!



ONE MAN WAS KILLED AND THE OTHERS WERE  
OUT OF ACTION FOR SOME TIME. BUT AS HE  
FOUGHT TO SAVE HIS RANCH, SORROW WAS ADDED  
TO GORDON'S ANGER. WHEN HIS BRAVE WIFE DIED,  
BUT EVEN AS HE STOOD BY HER LONELY GRAVE  
IN THE ORCHARD HE HAD PLANTED-- A BULLET  
HUMMED FROM COVER. --



THE DOGS! EVEN  
NOW THEY CAN'T  
LEAVE ME IN  
PEACE!



6  
THAT EVENING, IN THE RANCH-HOUSE, THE BOY SAW HIS FATHER PREPARING TO GO OUT ---

DAD --  
WHERE ARE  
YOU GOING ?

I'M GOING  
HUNTING, LAD --  
FOR COYOTES !  
STAY HERE !



ALL NIGHT THE BOY WAITED ALONE, THINKING OF HIS MOTHER LYING OUT IN THE ORCHARD WHICH SHE HAD LOVED SO MUCH, AND OF HIS FATHER OUT AMIDST THE DANGERS OF THE RANGE. BUT, BEFORE DAWN, HE COULD WAIT NO LONGER AND HE, TOO, RODE OUT ---



DAD !  
WHAT HAVE  
THEY DONE TO  
DAD ?

THAT'S FIXED GORDON,  
BOYS ! WE'LL HAVE NO  
MORE TROUBLE FROM  
HIM. NOW TO GET  
THE KID !



SCOURING THE RANGE IN THE MOONLIGHT FOR HIS FATHER, THE BOY WHEELED HIS HORSE BEHIND COVER AS HE HEARD THE THUD OF HOOFES AND A HARSH, TRIUMPHANT VOICE.



AT DAWN HE FOUND HIS FATHER,  
OUT IN THE LONELY HILLS, BUT  
HE WOULD NEVER SPEAK AGAIN--

THEY HANGED  
HIM, THE SKUNKS!  
HANGED WITH A  
MANILLA ROPE!

THE BOY CUT HIS  
FATHER DOWN AND  
BURIED HIM OUT  
THERE IN THE HILLS.  
AND HE VOWED THAT  
SOME DAY HE WOULD  
FIND THE MAN WHOSE  
ROPE HAD ENDED  
HIS LIFE.  
IN THAT LAND OF  
RAWHIDE LARIATS,  
A MANILLA ROPE  
WAS RARE.  
SOME DAY HE  
WOULD FIND THE  
RINGLEADER OF  
THE GANG.

THAT NIGHT THE GORDON RANCH-HOUSE BLAZED AND COLLAPSED TO A HEAP OF  
CHARRED CINDERS, AND STIFLING HIS GRIEF THE FIFTEEN YEAR OLD KID WHO HAD  
SET FLAME TO HIS HOME RODE AWAY TO DISAPPEAR INTO THE NIGHT.

THE CURS THAT  
MURDERED DAD WILL  
TRY TO GET ME NOW--  
BUT THEY SHAN'T GET ME AND  
SHAN'T HAVE OUR HOME FOR  
A RANGE SHACK,  
EITHER.

FROM THAT MOMENT THE BOY WAGED WAR AGAINST THE RANGE  
ROGUES. THINGS BEGAN TO HAPPEN WHICH HURT THE EASE AND  
SAFETY OF THE GRIDIRON CIRCLE. CATTLE WERE FOUND DEAD ALL  
OVER THE RANGE, AND THE KID WAS NEVER SHORT OF BEEF.

IN ONE WEEK,  
THREE PUNCHERS  
DIED TO HIS  
RIFLE--

IT'S THAT  
DANGED ORPHAN  
AGAIN!

SO THE ORPHAN GOT  
HIS NAME, AND  
MORE MEN DIED  
BEFORE THE DEADLY  
SHOOTING OF HIS  
50 SHARP'S RIFLE.  
A REIGN OF TERROR  
BEGAN ON THE  
GRIDIRON CIRCLE  
LANDS.  
HARDENED COWMEN  
WERE MADE FOOLS  
OF BY A  
FIFTEEN-YEAR  
OLD BOY --

HE WAS NEVER SHORT OF AMMUNITION, FOR ALL MEN WHO  
DIED WERE LEFT WITHOUT THEIR CARTRIDGE BELTS-- AND  
ONE NIGHT HE RAIDED THE RANCH STOREHOUSE ITSELF--

FIVE HUNDRED ROUNDS IN MY SADDLE-BAGS,  
A COUPLE OF SPARE COLTS AND ONE OF  
THE LATEST REPEATING WINCHESTERS--  
AND I'VE BUSTED UP ALL THE  
GUNS LEFT INSIDE!



THEIR NUMBERS LESSENER, THEIR NERVES RAGGED, THE GRIDIRON CIRCLE GANG CALLED IN PUNCHERS OF THE NEIGHBOURING U-B RANCH TO HELP. A BIG LYNCHING PARTY RODE OUT, SCOURING THE RANGE ~ ~

WE'VE GOT TO  
GET THAT ORPHAN!  
THERE'LL BE NO PEACE  
ON THE RANGE TILL  
WE HAVE!

BUT THE ORPHAN STRUCK BACK WHERE IT HIT  
HARDEST ~ ~ AT THE U-B RANCH ITSELF.

GUESS THEY'D  
BETTER LEARN IT'S  
PLUMB FOOLISH TO  
TAKE UP ANOTHER  
MAN'S QUARREL!

IT'S THE ORPHAN!  
HE'S THE ONLY GALLOOT  
THAT CAN SHOOT  
LIKE THAT!



THAT WAS THE STORY  
OF THE MAKING OF AN  
OUTLAW. FOR TEN YEARS  
THE ORPHAN WANDERED  
ALL OVER THE RANGE  
LIKE A HUNTED GREY  
WOLF--FIGHTING FOR  
HIS LIFE AT EVERY  
TURN. EVERY MAN'S  
HAND WAS AGAINST  
HIM. HE SHOT TO  
SAVE HIS OWN LIFE  
AND THE TALES OF  
HIS EXPLOITS  
REACHED EVEN  
THE NEWSPAPERS  
OF THE EAST.

AND AS THE LEGENDS SPREAD, THE ORPHAN REMAINED A LONE  
WOLF, HIS QUICK BRAIN DEFEATING ALL ATTEMPTS TO CATCH HIM,  
A BITTER SMILE, TWISTING HIS LIPS--EVEN WHILE HIS GUN  
ROARED DEATH.



## Chapter 2. THE ORPHAN MAKES A FRIEND

BUT THE DAY THAT SHERIFF JIM SHIELDS CAME TO THE DISTRICT AND TOOK OVER THE LAW BADGE, MARKED A CHANGE IN THE ORPHAN'S LIFE. --

SURE YOU GOT TO GET THE ORPHAN, SHERIFF. HE'S GOT A PLUMB DISTRESSIN' WAY OF USING ONE COW TO A MEAL, AND WE GOT TO HAVE SOME CATTLE LEFT IN TEXAS. BUT HE'S GOT A NASTY WAY O' HANDLIN' HIS GUN -- A HAIR TRIGGER AN' A NERVOUS FINGER.!



I ONLY KNOW WHAT I'VE HEARD ABOUT HIM, WHICH IS ALL BAD. BUT HE'S ONLY A YOUNGSTER, AND I'VE GOT FORTY YEARS, NEARLY ALL OF EXPERIENCE, BEHIND ME. I DON'T EXPECT MUCH TROUBLE GETTING HIM.



SHERIFF SHIELDS SOON DISCOVERED HIS MISTAKE. WHILE HE WAS HUNTING ALONG THE ORPHAN'S TRAIL FAR SOUTH IN TEXAS, THE OUTLAW WOULD BE UP NORTH HARRYING THE SHEEPMEN, AND LIVING ON MUTTON AND LAMB INSTEAD OF BEEF. UNTIL ONE DAY, THE SHERIFF AT LAST PICKED UP A TRAIL WHICH WAS NOT TOO COLD --

THE TRAIL TWISTED AND TURNED, PAST DENSE PATCHES OF CHAPARRAL THORN, PAST THICKETS OF HONEY MESQUITE AND GARDENS OF CACTUS, ANY OF WHICH MIGHT HIDE THE OUTLAW AND HIS EVER-READY GUN. --

THINGS ARE EDDY ENOUGH IN THIS TERRITORY WITHOUT THE ORPHAN. THEY SAY THE APACHES ARE OUT RAIDING, AND I DON'T WANT TO BE JUMPED BY A WAR PARTY.



BUT DOWN WHERE THE CIMARRON TRAIL RAN WEST AND EAST, AND WAS ~~SHARED~~ BY THE APACHE TRAIL WHICH CAME UP FROM THE SOUTH, THE ORPHAN RODE WITH EYES ALERT. HE KNEW THAT THE SHERIFF WAS ON HIS TRAIL, AND HAD ALSO SEEN AN APACHE PLACE AN OBJECT ON A HUGE BOULDER BY THE TRAIL--

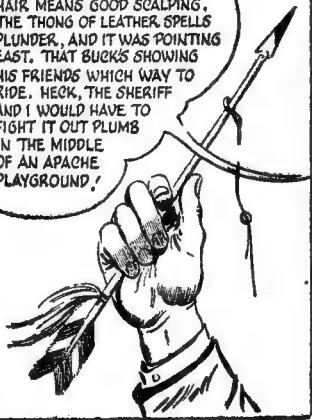
THAT'S AN APACHE SCOUT. GUESS THE WAR PARTIES AREN'T FAR AWAY!



HUH!  
APACHE WAR ARROW--  
LEFT AS A SIGN!



THAT RED ON THE HEAD'S BLOOD, AND THAT YELLOW HAIR MEANS GOOD SCALPING. THE THONG OF LEATHER SPELLS PLUNDER, AND IT WAS POINTING EAST. THAT BUCK'S SHOWING HIS FRIENDS WHICH WAY TO RIDE. HECK, THE SHERIFF AND I WOULD HAVE TO FIGHT IT OUT PLUMB IN THE MIDDLE OF AN APACHE PLAYGROUND!



STUDYING THE ARROW, THE ORPHAN SMILED GRIMLY AS AN IDEA CAME TO HIM. SOON HE RODE AWAY FROM THE ROCK AND HE LEFT THE ARROW, NOW CLEANED UP, POINTING NORTH--THE DIRECTION FROM WHICH HE EXPECTED THE SHERIFF TO COME--

RECKON THAT'LL SAVE THE VALLEYS TO THE EAST FROM MORE APACHE DEVILMENT--BUT THE SHERIFF WON'T THANK ME FOR SENDING THE WAR PARTY HIS WAY.

FROM COVER THE ORPHAN WATCHED AS A BIG APACHE WAR PARTY CAME THUNDERING ALONG THE TRAIL AND SWEEPED PAST THE ARROW SIGN--

--TWENTY-FOUR--  
TWENTY-SEVEN--  
HUH, RECKON I WON'T  
GET GAY WITH  
TWENTY-SEVEN APACHES.  
I CAN WAIT.

MOTIONLESS UNDER THE BURNING SUN, THE ORPHAN WAITED. AND MEANWHILE SHERIFF SHIELDS RODE SLAP INTO TROUBLE. ~~~

PALEFACE!

HECK,  
THEY'VE SEEN ME!  
I CAN'T FIGHT  
THAT WAR  
PARTY.



THE MAIN PARTY RACED ON, INTENT ON PLUNDER,  
~~~BUT SIX BRAVES WHEELED AWAY AND CAME  
WHOOPING AFTER THE SHERIFF~~~

I'LL CUT ACROSS THE  
APACHE TRAIL AND GO TO  
GROUND IN THE CHAPARRAL.  
IT'S THE ORPHAN I WANT  
RIGHT NOW.





BUT AS HE GALLOPED IN THE DIRECTION OF THE THICKETS WHERE THE ORPHAN LAY HIDDEN, THE SHERIFF COULD NOT SHAKE OFF HIS YELLING PURSUERS ~ ~ ~

RANGE IS TOO GREAT FOR A SIX-GUN  
~ ~ ~ BUT IT MIGHT DISCOURAGE 'EM!



NEXT MOMENT HE ROUNDED A BEND IN THE TRAIL AND A SHARP VOICE HALTED HIM ~ ~ ~

A TRUCE, SHERIFF!  
GET UNDER COVER!  
THOSE APACHES COME FIRST!



STARTLED, THE SHERIFF FOLLOWED THE ORPHAN INTO THE SHELTER OF THE THICKET.

I'VE GOT A SPOT WHERE THAT BOULDER'S COVERED, AND THEY'LL HALT THERE, SEEING THEY'LL DISCOVER YOU AREN'T FURTHER ALONG THE OPEN TRAIL.

HECK--  
I COULD GET HIM NOW--BUT  
I AGREED TO A TRUCE!

FROM THE ORPHAN'S VANTAGE POINT THEY WATCHED THE APACHES DISMOUNT AND CAST AROUND FOR SIGNS ON THE OPEN TRAIL----

YOU SHOOT FIRST AND I'LL FOLLOW YOU, SHERIFF. THEY'LL THINK YOU SHOT TWICE. NO SENSE LETTING 'EM THINK THERE'S TWO OF US--YET!

GOOD  
IDEA!

THE SHERIFF'S RIFLE CRACKED AND WHILE ONE APACHE SPUN ROUND AND FELL, ANOTHER BULLET WHINED TOWARDS THE GROUP ~~~



THE SHERIFF'S SECOND SHOT HIT A THIRD MAN AS HE DIVED FOR COVER ~~~



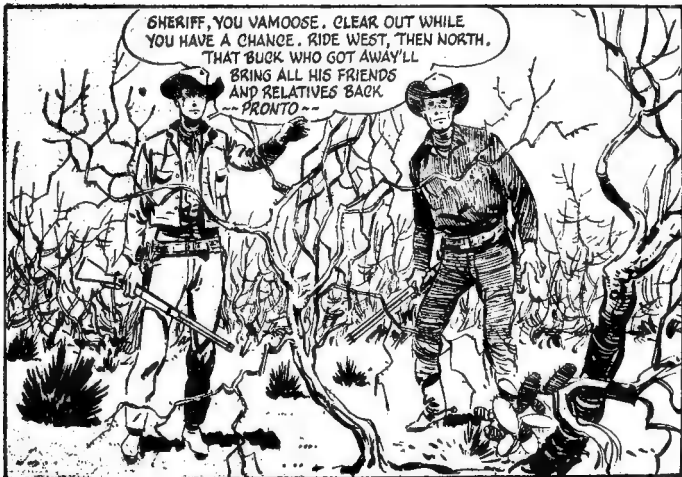
A FOURTH REDSKIN SHOWED HIMSELF FOR A SPLIT SECOND AND AGAIN THE EAGLE-EYED OUTLAW'S RIFLE CRACKED ~~~



TERRIFIED BY THE DEADLINESS OF THE RIFLE FIRE, THE REMAINING APACHES LEAPED ON THEIR PONIES AND RACED FOR THEIR LIVES. BUT LEADEN MESSENGERS FOLLOWED THEM ---



SHERIFF, YOU VAMOOSE. CLEAR OUT WHILE YOU HAVE A CHANCE. RIDE WEST, THEN NORTH. THAT BUCK WHO GOT AWAY'LL BRING ALL HIS FRIENDS AND RELATIVES BACK -- PRONTO --



IT'S TOO DARNED BAD YOU'RE  
BAD, ORPHAN. YOU'D MAKE A  
BLAMED GOOD CONPUNCHER.!

YOU'RE A  
SQUARE MAN,  
SHERIFF --  
SO LONG.!

AND THE SHERIFF RODE AWAY ALONE,  
BACK TO FORD'S STATION, WHILE  
THE ORPHAN STOOD FOR A LONG  
WHILE WATCHING THE FIRST MAN  
WHO HAD GIVEN HIM A CHANCE TO  
BE PARTNERS. THAT NIGHT IN HIS  
LONELY CAMP IN THE SHELTER OF  
THE HILLS THE OUTLAW THOUGHT  
FOR A LONG TIME OF THE LAWMAN  
WHO HAD BEHAVED AS A FRIEND.

YEAH, HE'S A STRAIGHT-SHOOTER,  
THAT SHERIFF. TOO BAD IF  
NEXT TIME WE MEET  
I HAVE 'TO SHOOT  
HIM.



## Chapter 3. SAVED FROM THE APACHES

BUT FATE---AND THE APACHES---AGAIN TOOK A HAND IN THE LIFE OF THE ORPHAN. TWO DAYS LATER, BILL HOWLAND, VETERAN DRIVER, OF THE STAGECOACH FROM SAGETOWN, LEFT THE RAILHEAD ON THE EIGHTY-MILE DRIVE TO FORD'S STATION.

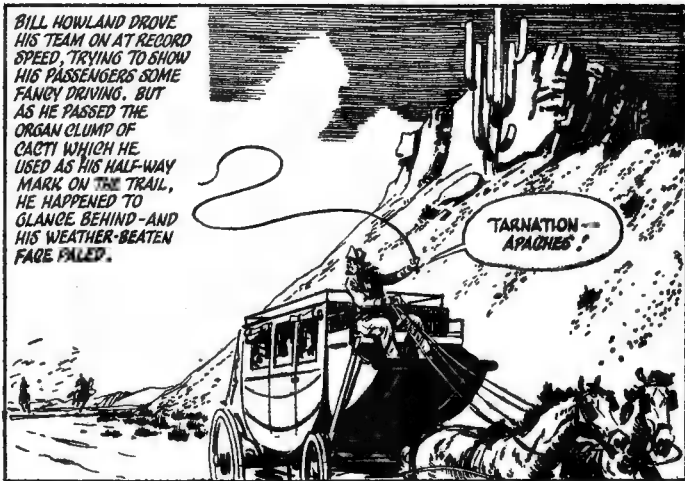


GET GOIN',  
AN' KEEP GOIN'!  
THE APACHES ARE OUT AN'  
I AIN'T PLANNIN' TO STOP  
AN' PICK NO PRAIRIE  
FLOWERS. I'VE GOT A  
VALLYBLE CARGO!

THERE WERE THREE PASSENGERS IN THE COACH -- MISS GRACE RYDENE AND HELEN AND MARY SHIELDS, ON THE WAY TO STAY WITH THEIR BROTHER, AT FORD'S STATION --



BILL HOWLAND DROVE HIS TEAM ON AT RECORD SPEED, TRYING TO SHOW HIS PASSENGERS SOME FANCY DRIVING. BUT AS HE PASSED THE ORGAN CLUMP OF CACTI WHICH HE USED AS HIS HALF-WAY MARK ON THE TRAIL, HE HAPPENED TO GLANCE BEHIND--AND HIS WEATHER-BEATEN FACE PALED.



A MILE BEHIND, THE APACHES RACED GRIMLY ON THEIR FLEET PONIES, BENT ON OVERTAKING THE SPEEDING COACH.



DESPERATELY BILL HOWLAND TRIED TO URGE  
MORE FROM HIS LATHERED TEAM~~

GIDDYAP!  
HIYI, YIPPEREE!  
WHOOOO~~~  
WHOOOO!





LURCHING AND JOLTING, THROWING ITS TERRIFIED PASSENGERS FROM SIDE TO SIDE, THE COACH RACED ON. REMORSELESSLY THE APACHES OVERHAULED IT, AND BEGAN TO SPREAD OUT IN THE DREADED CRESCENT FORMATION WHICH WOULD BRING THEM IN ON ALL SIDES TO ENCIROLE THE COACH WHEN THEY OVERTOOK IT --



BILL HOWLAND'S ONE THOUGHT WAS FOR HIS PASSENGERS. ALL DEPENDED ON HIS TEAM. WOULD THEY KEEP UP THIS KILLING PACE FOR THE REST OF THE WAY? ALREADY FLAT REPORTS SOUNDED BEHIND HIM -- ALREADY BULLETS WERE DROPPING IN THE DUST OF HIS MAD PROGRESS --



INSIDE THE COACH THE THREE WOMEN HURDLED IN A MASS ON THE FLOOR, WHERE THEY HAD BEEN THROWN -- AND HELEN HAD FAINTED AFTER STRIKING HER HEAD --



AS YET THEY WERE UNAWARE OF THE DREAD PURSUERS ---  
BUT SOMEONE ELSE HAD SEEN THE PLIGHT OF THE COACH.  
THE ORPHAN CAME RIDING OVER THE RIDGE NEAR THE TRAIL ---



WHO'S DOING  
THE SHOOTING?  
HECK~~  
APACHES!

THE APACHES, INTENT ON THEIR QUARRY, DID  
NOT SEE THE ORPHAN AS HE GALLOPED DOWN  
THE SLOPE. HIS RIFLE SPOKE ---



THE APACHES DID NOT HEAR THE SHOT AND IN THEIR EXCITEMENT DID NOT SEE THEIR FELLOW FALL--BUT BILL HOWLAND LOOKED BACK, AS MORE BULLETS RIPPED ALONG THE ROOF OF THE COACH--AND HE CHEERED.

COME ON, PURN YOU!  
COME ON YOU WOLVES!  
YOU CHEAP BLIND VULTURES!  
SHOOT WHILE YOU CAN FOR YOU'LL  
SOON BE SO FULL O' LEAD YOU'LL  
STOP FOREVER!



KEEP IT UP, BRONCS!  
HI-YI, HOLD IT FOR TEN  
MINUTES -- WE'LL WIN!  
WE'LL DANCE ON THEIR  
PAINTED FACES!  
WHOOO-PEEE!



AGAIN THE ORPHAN FIRED AS HE CLOSED  
IN ON THE RED RAIDERS. ANOTHER  
APACHE PLUNGED TO THE DUST~~



AND THEN  
ANOTHER~~

BEWARE!  
AAAAH~~



NOW IT WAS THAT THE APACHES  
BECAME AWARE OF THE  
ORPHAN'S PRESENCE~~



AIEE!  
WE ARE  
ATTACKED!

WHOOA!



GOT YOU,  
YOU RED DEVIL!  
THAT LEAVES  
ONLY ONE OF  
YOU!



THE LAST APACHE, AFTER EMPTYING HIS RIFLE TOWARDS THE ORPHAN, RACED AWAY, BUT ONE OF HIS BULLETS FOUND ITS MARK --- AND THE ORPHAN CRASHED TO THE GROUND ---





WHILE THE WOMEN BESIEGED HIM WITH TEARFUL QUESTIONS BILL HOWLAND FETCHED HIS CANTEN AND POURED WATER OVER THE ORPHAN'S HEAD AND FACE.



MUTTERING, THE ORPHAN OPENED HIS EYES AND PULLED HIMSELF TO HIS FEET, AND HIS HAND HALF-DREW HIS SIX-GUN AS HE GLARED AROUND, LOOKING FOR FURTHER ENEMIES ~~~

HOW CAN WE  
THANK YOU FOR  
WHAT YOU HAVE  
DONE!

AND THEN,  
AS HIS HEAD  
CLEARED,  
THE ORPHAN  
REMEMBERED  
WHAT HAD  
HAPPENED.  
AND HE SMILED.  
HELEN, THOUGH  
STILL WEAK  
AND DIZZY,  
TOOK CHARGE  
SEEING THE  
BLOOD POURING  
FROM HIS WOUND.  
SHE ORDERED  
BILL TO UNHOOK  
THE KEG OF  
WATER THAT WAS  
SLUNG ON THE  
REAR AXLE OF  
THE COACH,  
AND SWIFTLY  
BANDAGED THE  
ORPHAN'S HEAD—

YOU MAKE ME THINK I'M REALLY  
HURT, MA'AM. NOW IF IT WAS A  
REAL WOUND, THIS'D BE ALL  
RIGHT. BUT ALL  
THIS FUSS ABOUT  
A SCRATCH!

INDEED,  
YOU SHOULD BE  
THANKFUL IT'S  
NO WORSE!

HELEN UNFASTENED THE GOLD PIN THAT  
SHE WORE AT HER THROAT AND PINNED  
THE BANDAGE INTO PLACE. —

THERE!  
YOU LOOK REAL  
WELL IN A  
BANDAGE!

YOU LOOK  
FINE AND BANDY,  
ORPHAN!

WITH SHOCKED EXCLAMATIONS, MISS RITCHIE AND MARY SHIELDS RECOILED AT THE SOUND OF THE DREADED NAME.

THE ORPHAN!  
OH!

SO THIS IS THE ORPHAN,  
THE DREADED OUTLAW WHOSE  
OUTRAGES FILL THE PAPERS  
AND MAGAZINES BACK IN  
THE EAST! HE DOESN'T  
SEEM SO BAD AS  
THEY SAY!





BUT BEFORE SHE TURNED TO GO TO THE COACH, HELEN SHIELDS HELD OUT HER HAND AND SPOKE SIMPLY--

FORGIVE HER! SHE DOESN'T MEAN TO BE RUDE. THIS AFTERNOON HAS BEEN TOO MUCH FOR HER. I, AT LEAST, WILL TELL MY BROTHER ABOUT YOUR SPLENDID ACT!

THANK YOU. YOU ARE KIND--AND FAIR--BUT YOU ARE ALONE IN YOUR FAITH!

AS HELEN CLIMBED BADLY INTO THE COACH, THE ORPHAN MOUNTED HIS HORSE AND FOUND HIS SOMBRERO WHERE IT HAD FALLEN--THEN RODE UP BESIDE BILL FOR A LAST WORD AS THE DRIVER GOT READY TO CONTINUE HIS JOURNEY.

HOW COME YOU'VE GOT A CROSS BAR-B HORS, ORPHAN?

OH, I RAN INTO ONE OF THEIR PUNCHERS--AND WE SORT OF SWAPPED. ADIOS, BILL!

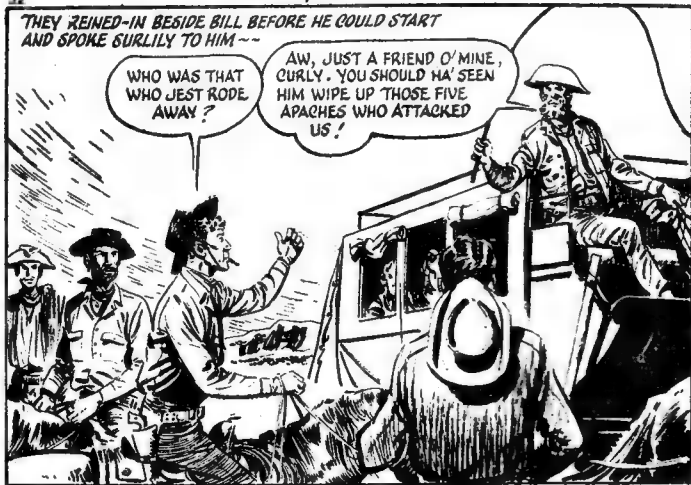
AS THE ORPHAN GALLOPED AWAY WITH A FINAL WAVE, BILL HOWLAND HEARD THE THUD OF HOOFES AND THE JINGLE OF HARNESS AND FIVE COWPUNCHERS CAME OVER THE RISE. THEY WERE THE FIVE WORST MEN OF THE CROSS BAR-B OUTFIT--



THEY REINED-IN BESIDE BILL BEFORE HE COULD START  
AND SPOKE SURLILY TO HIM --

WHO WAS THAT  
WHO JEST RODE  
AWAY?

AW, JUST A FRIEND O' MINE,  
CURLY. YOU SHOULD HA' SEEN  
HIM WIPE UP THOSE FIVE  
APACHES WHO ATTACKED  
US!



YORE LYING ABILITY IS REAL  
HIGH-FALUTIN', HOWLAND. SUPPOSE  
YUH TELL THE TRUTH BEFORE  
WE DRAG IT OUT OF YUH.  
WHO IS HE?

WAS THAT THE  
DARNED ORPHAN?  
COME ON, NOW,  
TALK STRAIGHT!



ORPHAN?  
ORPHAN NOTHING!  
HE AIN'T NO FRIEND O' MINE.  
GEE! IS THE ORPHAN  
LOOSE IN THIS COUNTRY,  
OUT HERE ALONG  
MY ROUTE?



THE MAN CALLED CURLY  
SPOKE SAVAGELY --

THE ORPHAN KILLED ONE OF  
THE CROSS BAR-8 BOYS IN A  
GUNFIGHT THIS MORNING.  
WE'RE SENDING OUT LYNCHING  
PARTIES -- SHERIFF ~~UN~~ NO  
SHERIFF!



THE ORPHAN  
SEEMS TO HAVE  
A WHOLE LOT OF  
FRIENDS IN THIS  
COUNTRY!

UNOBSERVED BY THE HORSEMEN, THE SHERIFF  
AND A DEPUTY RODE ALONGSIDE --

EVEN TH' BRAVE SHERIFF LOSES  
HIS TRAIL! EVERYBODY IS A-TALKIN'  
ABOUT IT! AN' WE'LL HAVE A NEW  
SHERIFF BEFORE LONG. HE'S  
A FINE SHERIFF,  
HE IS!

NICE AFTERNOON,  
CURLY!



THE SHERIFF WALKED HIS HORSE FORWARD CALMLY UNTIL HE WAS CLOSE TO THE LYNCHING PARTY.

I'VE BEEN TALKING TO SNEED, YOUR FOREMAN, AND HE MADE CERTAIN PROMISES. RECKON YOU'RE OUT AGAINST ORDERS. I'M THE LAW ROUND HERE, AND IF ANYONE'S GOING TO CATCH THE ORPHAN, I AM! THERE'LL BE NO NECKTIE PARTIES!

OUT STARED BY THE GOLD EYES OF THE SHERIFF, THE COWPUNCHERS RODE AWAY, MUTTERING, YET STILL DETERMINED TO HUNT DOWN THE ORPHAN. AND THEN THE SHERIFF'S MIND WAS FILLED WITH OTHER THINGS AS THE DOOR OF THE COACH FLEW OPEN AND HE HEARD JOYFUL VOICES.

JIM! WE'RE SO GLAD TO SEE YOU!

HELEN-- MARY-- GRACE! DANG ME, I DIDN'T EXPECT YOU FOR SEVERAL DAYS YET!

WITH THE STORY OF THE APACHE ATTACK TOLD, THE SHERIFF AND HIS DEPUTY ESCORTED THE COACH ON THE REMAINDER OF ITS JOURNEY TO FORD'S STATION.

THAT'S THE SECOND  
DEBT I OWE THAT LONE  
WOLF. I SURE HOPE HE  
DON'T RUN INTO TROUBLE  
WITH THOSE MAVERICKS  
FROM THE CROSS BAR-8.



BUT UP IN THE HILLS NOT FAR AWAY,  
THE ORPHAN SMILED AS HE LOOKED  
DOWN FROM COVER THROUGH A GAP  
IN THE CHAPARRAL  
THORN --

SURE SOME FIGHT  
GOIN' ON DOWN THERE ---  
I GUESS THOSE CROSS BAR-8  
COYOTES HAVE COME TO THE  
END O' THE TRAIL!



THE ORPHAN HAD LED HIS PURSUERS STRAIGHT INTO THE  
ARMS OF A BIG APACHE WAR-PARTY --



AND THE ORPHAN WAVED IN FAREWELL AS HE RODE  
AWAY. THE TIMBER WOLF HAD WON AGAIN.

## Chapter 4. THE ORPHAN MAKES A FRESH START

BUT FROM THAT MOMENT THE ORPHAN BEGAN TO MAKE NAME ON THE CROSS BAR-B-RANCH. HE USED THE SHATTERING TACTICS THAT HAD WRECKED OTHER RANCHES WHICH HAD SENT THEIR MEN OUT AGAINST HIM.



MEN DIED TO THE TUNE OF  
ROARING SIX-GUNS.

I USE BULLETS--  
NOT ROPES!



MEN BEGAN TO LOSE SLEEP, WHILE THEY WAITED ON GUARD AND DODGED THE BULLETS THAT SCREAMED OUT OF THE NIGHT. SNEED, THE FOREMAN, BEWAILED THE LOSS OF MEN AND OF DOZENS OF CATTLE. WITH HIM WERE TEX WILLIARD AND BUCKNELL, TWO OF HIS TOUGHEST MEN.

HE'S WRECKIN' THE WHOLE RANCH.  
WE GOT TO GET THAT ORPHAN  
BOYS!

I'VE GOT A HUNCH  
I CAN CATCH HIM, SNEED--  
THROUGH BILL HOWLAND  
AND THAT SHERIFF.  
LEAVE IT TO BUCKNELL  
AND ME!



WHAT'S YORE  
HUNCH, TEX?

HOWLAND'S ALWAYS SHOOTIN' HIS  
MOUTH OFF ABOUT HOW THE ORPHAN  
SAVED THE COACH. RECKON HE'S A  
PART OF THE ORPHAN, SO  
WE'LL ROPE IN A COUPLE  
OF BOYS AND START  
ON HOWLAND!



A FEW HOURS LATER, AS BILL HOWLAND SWUNG  
HIS COACH THROUGH A NARROW DEFILE --





TEX WILLIARD RODE FORWARD ~~~



WHAT IN  
THUNDER DO  
YOU WANT ?

YOU!  
GET DOWN!  
YOU'RE GONNA DO  
SOME TALKING  
ABOUT THE  
ORPHAN.

ANGRILY, BILL HOWLAND GLIMBED DOWN, BUT AS THE EVIL-FACED  
COWPUNCHER CONTINUED TO HURL ~~CURSES~~ AND INSULTS AT HIM,  
HE SWUNG THE WHIP WHICH WAS STILL COILED IN HIS HAND ~~~



YOU'RE THE  
FOURTH DOG I CUT  
TO-DAY !

NEXT MOMENT LARIATS DROPPED OVER THE DRIVER'S SHOULDERS AND HE STRUGGLED VAINLY --

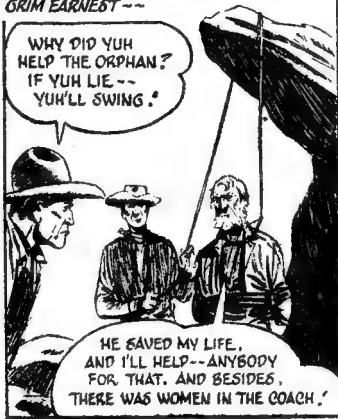


NOW --  
MAYBE YOU'LL  
TALK!



WHEN BILL HOWLAND RECOVERED HIS SENSES HE FOUND HIMSELF IN DEADLY DANGER. HIS ATTACKERS WERE IN GRIM EARNEST --

WHY DID YUH  
HELP THE ORPHAN?  
IF YUH LIE --  
YUH'LL SWING!



HE SAVED MY LIFE,  
AND I'LL HELP -- ANYBODY  
FOR THAT. AND BESIDES,  
THERE WAS WOMEN IN THE COACH!

THERE WAS, HEY? NOW ANSWER THIS ONE-- AN' NO LIE GOES-- WHY DON'T THE SHERIFF GET BUSY AND CAMP ON HIS TRAIL? WHAT INTEREST HAS TH' SHERIFF AN' THE ORPHAN IN EACH OTHER?

I--  
DON'T--  
KNOW!

WILLIARD SNARLED AN ORDER. THE NOOSE WAS PUT ROUND HOWLAND'S NECK. SUDDENLY A CRY RANG OUT FROM THE MAN WHO WAS GUARDING THE TRAIL.

HANDS UP! DON'T MOVE!  
I'LL BLOW YORE HEAD OFF  
AT THE FIRST MOVE!

WELL, WELL, IF TEX WILLIARD AIN'T HERE, TOO! WHAT'S YOUR PET PSALM, SONNY? I'LL SEE THAT IT'S SUNG OVER YOUR GRAVE!

I RECKON  
WE NEED A  
NEW SHERIFF--  
AND DURN QUICK,  
TOO! RECKON  
I'LL TAKE YORE  
GUNS FOR A  
WHILE!

NO MAN GETS MY GUN-BUTTS  
FIRST WITHOUT GETTING  
MUSSED UP INSIDE. PUT UP  
THAT GUN AND SCOOT  
BEFORE I BLOW YOUR  
DURVED HEAD OFF!



AND THEN SUDDENLY TEX WILLIARD AND  
HIS MEN JUMPED AS A VOICE SPoke  
PLEASANTLY FROM ABOVE THEM--

AFTERNOON,  
GENTS! MIND  
IF I JOIN THIS  
PARTY!



SHORTING WITH LAUGHTER, THE  
SHERIFF WHIPPED OUT HIS GUNS.



TEX WILLIARD TREMBLED IN TERROR. MORE THAN ANY OTHER MAN HE SECRETLY FEARED THE ORPHAN -- AND HE DARED NOT TRY TO SHOOT IT OUT WITH HIM --

HE'LL GET ME!  
I CAN'T SHOOT!  
HE'S OUT TO  
GET ME!



AND THEN BILL HOWLAND, RELEASED FROM THE NOOSE, WENT WILD --

TAKE THAT, YOU  
MANGY COYOTE --  
YOU LOP-EARED  
WOLF!



THREE MEN WENT DOWN BEFORE HIS FRENZIED BLOWS AS THE ORPHAN AND THE SHERIFF WATCHED -- AND THEN TEX WILLIARD TOOK THE BRUNT OF HIS FURY --

DON'T BLAME YOU,  
BILL, AFTER WHAT THEY  
DID TO YOU. GUESS  
I WON'T BE NEEDING  
MY GUNS JUST  
NOW!

LYNCH ME,  
WOULD YOU ?  
HIT ME WHEN  
I WAS TIED,  
EH ?



SOME MINUTES PASSED BEFORE THE ENRAGED DRIVER COULD BE CALMED DOWN. THEN WILLIARD AND HIS MEN BEGAN TO RECOVER -- AND WERE LINED UP AGAINST THE ROCK WALL BY THE SHERIFF AND THE ORPHAN.

GET OUT OF THIS COUNTRY AND NEVER COME BACK. I DON'T CARE WHERE YOU GO, SO LONG AS YOU GO RIGHT NOW. IF YOU SHOW YOUR FACES AGAIN I'LL SHOOT FIRST AND TALK AFTER.

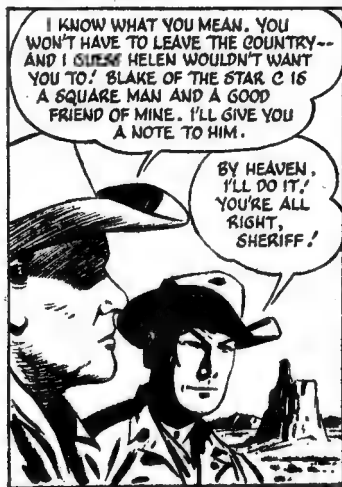
SAME HERE!



SLOWLY, THE COWBOYS RODE AWAY, AND WILLIARD, LEADING THEM, WAS TREMBLING WITH FRIGHT AND ALMOST SOBBING WITH RELIEF.

HE ALMOST GOT ME!  
HE ALMOST GOT ME!





SO WHILE SHERIFF SHIELDS RODE TO THE CROSS BAR-B, TO TELL SNEED THAT HE WAS NOW SHORT OF FOUR MORE MEN, THE ORPHAN RODE ACROSS COUNTRY TO THE BIG STAR-C RANCH, WHERE HE WAS WELCOMED BY BLAKE, THE FOREMAN --



## Chapter 5. THE MAN HUNT

THE CATTLE ON THE 'STAR C' NUMBERED THOUSANDS AND ITS HORSES WERE THE BEST FOR MILES AROUND. IN A PART OF THE COUNTRY LITTLE TRAVERSED AND CROSSED BY NO TRAILS, IT WAS REMOVED FROM THE ZONE OF THE ORPHAN'S ACTIVITIES. THE RANCH-HANDS; A HAPPY AND FRIENDLY BAND, KNEW HIM BY REPUTATION BUT ASKED NO QUESTIONS. THEY ACCEPTED HIM AND RESPECTED HIM FOR HIS SKILL WITH HORSE AND GUN.

THE ORPHAN WAS HAPPY.

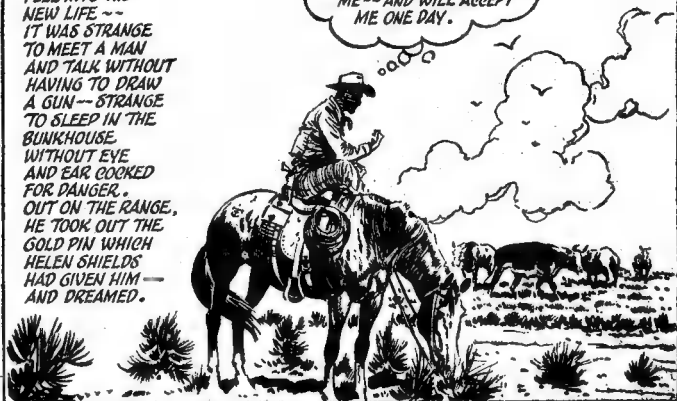
GET ACQUAINTED WITH YOUR OUTFIT, ORPHAN. DON'T HURT HUMBLE'S DOG, AND HE'LL BE PLUMB NICE TO YOU. AND IF SILENT THERE WANTS TO KNOW IF YOU LIKE HIS SINGING AND BANJO PLAYING -- LIE, AND SAY IT'S FINE!





THE DAYS PASSED  
AND THE ORPHAN  
FELL INTO HIS  
NEW LIFE --  
IT WAS STRANGE  
TO MEET A MAN  
AND TALK WITHOUT  
HAVING TO DRAW  
A GUN -- STRANGE  
TO SLEEP IN THE  
BUNKHOUSE  
WITHOUT EYE  
AND EAR COOKED  
FOR DANGER.  
OUT ON THE RANGE,  
HE TOOK OUT THE  
GOLD PIN WHICH  
HELEN SHIELDS  
HAD GIVEN HIM --  
AND DREAMED.

MAYBE I'LL GET A CHANCE TO  
MAKE GOOD. MAYBE EVEN  
HELEN SHIELDS REMEMBERS  
ME -- AND WILL ACCEPT  
ME ONE DAY.



AND ONE SUNDAY, WHEN THE WHOLE OUTFIT RODE INTO FORD'S STATION  
FOR DINNER AT THE INVITATION OF MRS SHIELDS, THE ORPHAN FOUND  
THAT HELEN REMEMBERED.

HELEN TAKES SUCH AN INTEREST  
IN HIM, BEING YOUNG AND SYMPATHETIC  
AND ROMANTIC. SHE'S PLEASED I'VE  
GIVEN HIM A START IN A RIGHT  
DIRECTION. SHE'S A BLAMED  
FINE GIRL, TOM.



YOU CAN KEEP THE PIN, ORPHAN, IF YOU PROMISE ME NEVER TO SHOOT A MAN AGAIN, UNLESS IT'S ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY TO SAVE

I PROMISE NEVER TO SHOOT A MAN, WOMAN, CHILD, OR -- OR ANYBODY, MISS HELEN!

YOUR LIFE, OR THAT OF A FRIEND!



AND AT DINNER THE ORPHAN WAS MOVED BY A FINE TRIBUTE. --

I'M ASKING YOU FOLKS TO DRINK A TOAST TO THE MAN WHO SAVED MY SISTERS AND MISS RITCHIE AND MADE THIS DINNER POSSIBLE. LONG LIFE AND HAPPINESS TO THE ORPHAN!



AFTER THE DINNER AT THE SHERIFF'S HOUSE, LIFE MEANT MUCH TO THE ORPHAN, FOR THE DINNER HAD DONE ITS WORK AND DONE IT WELL. AND HELEN~~ HE BELIEVED~~ WOULD NOT REFUSE HIM WHEN THE TIME CAME TO DECIDE. HIS SMILE BECAME MORE OPEN AND EASY AND HIS FACE LOST THE BITTERNESS OF TEN YEARS' LONELINESS.

THEN ONE DAY THE SHERIFF SPRANG A SURPRISE WHEN HE RODE OUT TO THE STAR-C.

I'M GOING BACK INTO THE RANCHING BUSINESS, ORPHAN. I'VE BOUGHT THE A-Y OUTFIT FROM CRAWFORD, AND I WANT YOU AS FOREMAN WHILE I RE-STOCK IT!



CRAWFORD OF THE A-Y WAS GOING BACK EAST, BUT HE LEFT A FINE OUTFIT BEHIND.

THERE YOU ARE, ORPHAN. SWEET GRASS, AND PLENTY OF WATER FROM THOSE WIND-PUMPS-- AND A GOOD HOUSE IF YOU EVER WANT TO SETTLE DOWN IN A HOME. YOU'LL DO ALL THE WORK AND I'LL SIT BACK AND TAKE THE PROFITS!

SUITS ME, SHERIFF!



ALL THE DISTRICT WATCHED TO SEE WHAT SORT OF A JOB THE ORPHAN WOULD MAKE OF THE RANCH -- AND AS A MONTH PASSED MANY PEOPLE IN FORD'S STATION WERE JUBILANT.

THE SHERIFF WAS RIGHT IN GIVING THAT YOUNG FELLER A CHANCE. HE'S SHORE CHANGED!

YEP, EVEN SNEED OUT AT THE CROSS BAR-8 HAS RIDDEN OVER THERE TWICE AND COME AWAY FRIENDLY!



BUT ONE DAY THE SHERIFF LEFT FOR CHICAGO TO ARRANGE FOR FUTURE CATTLE SHIPMENTS --

I'LL BE AWAY A WEEK OR SO, ORPHAN. KEEP THINGS MOVING WHILE I'VE GONE!

SURE, SHERIFF. WE'RE BUSY REPAIRING FENCES!



BUT NEXT NIGHT TROUBLE BROKE OUT AGAIN AT THE CROSS BAR-8. THE OLD TROUBLE OF SHOTS RIPPING IN FROM THE DARKNESS TO SMASH AND HARRY --

HECK!  
IT CAN'T BE  
THE ORPHAN!



SNEED AND HIS PUNCHERS SEARCHED FAR AND WIDE BUT FOUND NO TRACE OF THE MARKSMAN WHO HAD SPATTERED THE RANCH AND BUNKHOUSE WITH BULLETS ~~

I'LL WAGER IT'S THE ORPHAN BUSTING OUT AGAIN. MAN CAN'T CHANGE HIS SPOTS SO EASY!

I DON'T BELIEVE IT! BUT TO-MORROW I'M GONNA FIND OUT!

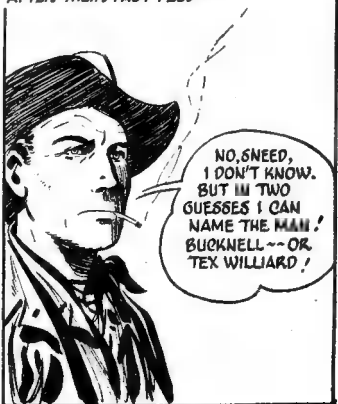


NEXT DAY THE CROSS BAR-B FOREMAN RODE OVER TO THE A-Y RANCH. HE WAS WARY AND READY FOR TROUBLE AND HIS HAND WAS READY TO DROP TO HIS GUN AS THE ORPHAN'S EYES FLASHED WHILE HE TOLD HIS STORY —

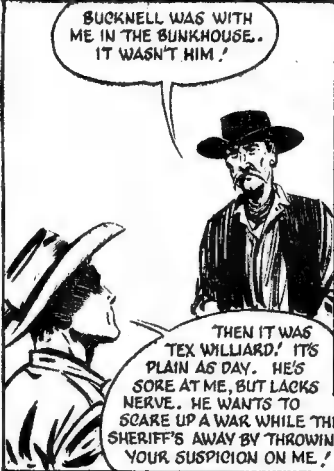
FOR A MOMENT THE ORPHAN STARED AT SNEED ~~ THEN HE REALISED THAT THE MAN HAD SOME RIGHT TO QUESTION HIM AFTER THEIR PAST FEUD ~~



NOW I WANT TO ASK YOU A QUESTION, THOUGH I MAY BE A TURNED FOOL FOR DOING IT. DO YOU KNOW WHO DID IT?



NO, SNEED, I DON'T KNOW. BUT IN TWO GUESSES I CAN NAME THE MAN! BUCKNELL ~~ OR TEX WILLIARD!



BUCKNELL WAS WITH ME IN THE BUNKHOUSE. IT WASN'T HIM!


THEN IT WAS TEX WILLIARD. IT'S PLAIN AS DAY. HE'S SORE AT ME, BUT LACKS NERVE. HE WANTS TO SCARE UP A WAR WHILE THE SHERIFF'S AWAY BY THROWING YOUR SUSPICION ON ME!



HIS EYES GLINTING WITH THE OLD LIGHT, THE ORPHAN STRODE AWAY TO THE RANCH-HOUSE.

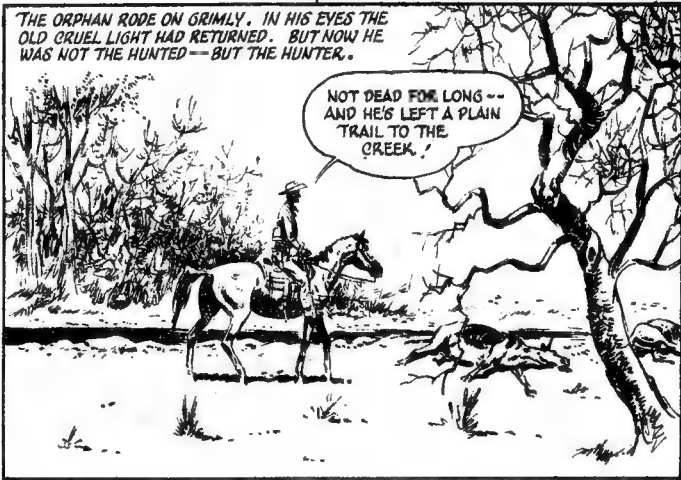
GO BACK, AND TELL YOUR MEN ABOUT THIS, SNEED, AND TELL THEM NOT TO RIDE OVER MY RANGE FOR A FEW DAYS -- OR THEY MIGHT GET HURT BEFORE THEY'RE KNOWN!

THE ORPHAN TOLD HIS HANDS AND PUT THEM ON GUARD AND LATER, AS HE RODE AWAY TO START HIS HUNT, ONE OF THEM CAME RIDING IN EXCITEDLY --



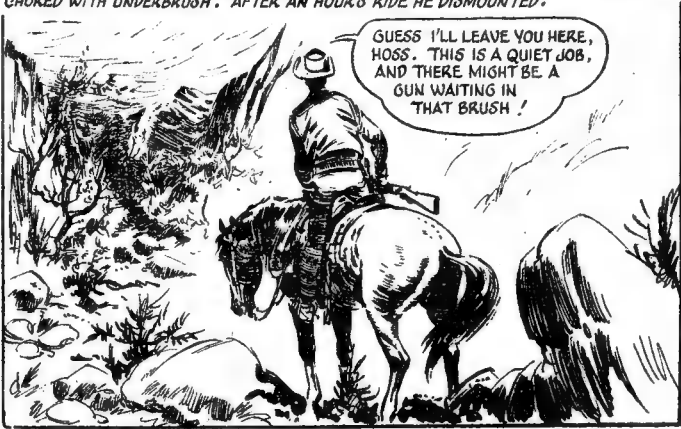
HEY, ORPHAN, SOMEONE'S SHORE ENOUGH PLUGGED SOME OF OUR COWS NEAR THE CREEK. I LOST HIS TRAIL AT THE COTTONWOODS!

THE ORPHAN RODE ON GRIMLY. IN HIS EYES THE OLD CRUEL LIGHT HAD RETURNED. BUT NOW HE WAS NOT THE HUNTED—BUT THE HUNTER.



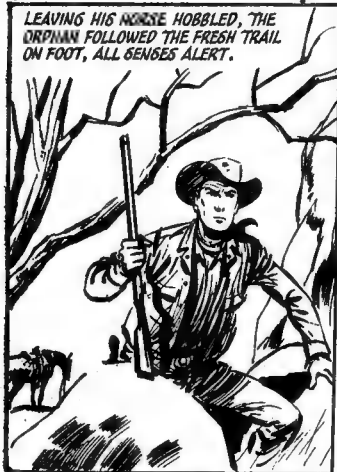
NOT DEAD FOR LONG --  
AND HE'S LEFT A PLAIN  
TRAIL TO THE  
CREEK.!

THE TRAIL WAS LOST IN THE WATER OF THE CREEK, BUT, SCOUTING ON THE FAR BANK, THE ORPHAN PICKED IT UP AGAIN SOME WAY AWAY. HE RODE INTO A MAZE OF RAVINES CHOKED WITH UNDERBRUSH. AFTER AN HOUR'S RIDE HE DISMOUNTED.



GUESS I'LL LEAVE YOU HERE,  
HOSS. THIS IS A QUIET JOB,  
AND THERE MIGHT BE A  
GUN WAITING IN  
THAT BRUSH!

LEAVING HIS HORSE HOBBOLED, THE ORPHAN FOLLOWED THE FRESH TRAIL ON FOOT, ALL SENSES ALERT.



SUDDENLY THE REPORT OF A GUN RANG OUT ~~



THE ORPHAN THREW UP HIS ARMS, AND PITCHED FORWARD DOWN A SLOPE. ~~





DOWN THE SHORT SLOPE  
ROLLED THE ORPHAN--



BUT AT THE BOTTOM HE SWIFTLY DRAGGED  
HIMSELF BEHIND THE BIG LOG--



SWIFTLY HE TUGGED OFF HIS BOOTS AND THRUST THEM PARTLY  
INTO THE BRUSH--AND THEN CRAWLED AWAY INTO THE  
SHELTER, TAKING CARE TO SEE THAT HE WAS  
SCREENED FROM THE HIDDEN MARKSMAN  
BY THE BUSHES--



THE ORPHAN WIGGLED INTO THE BRUSH AND WAITED-- GUN READY.



SOON--FROM ANOTHER DIRECTION--  
ANOTHER SHOT RANG OUT--



ANOTHER SHOT FOLLOWED--AND ANOTHER--  
AND THEN SILENCE. TENSELY THE ORPHAN  
WAITED, FOR HALF-AN-HOUR. THEN, SUDDENLY  
HE HEARD RUSTLING IN THE BUSHES--  
BEHIND HIM!



HARDLY DARING TO BREATHE, HE LISTENED  
TO THE CRACKLING OF TWIGS AND THE  
RUSTLING OF LEAVES, AND THEN--



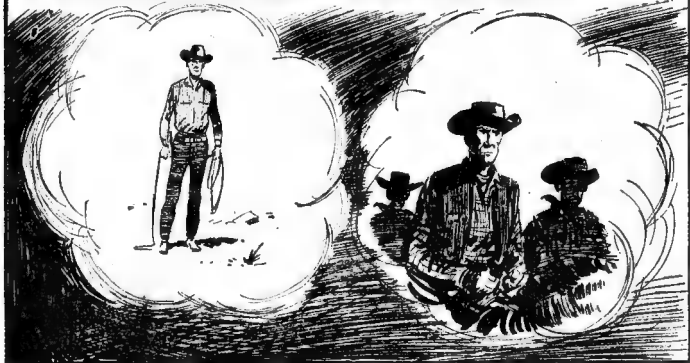
AS THE BUSHWHACKER STEPPED WARILY INTO THE OPEN, HIS GAZE FIXED ON THE MOTIONLESS BOOTS, A VOICE SPOKE SOFTLY.



THE PROWLER FROZE-- THEN TURNED SLOWLY TO LOOK SQUARELY INTO THE GUN OF THE MAN HE THOUGHT HE HAD KILLED.

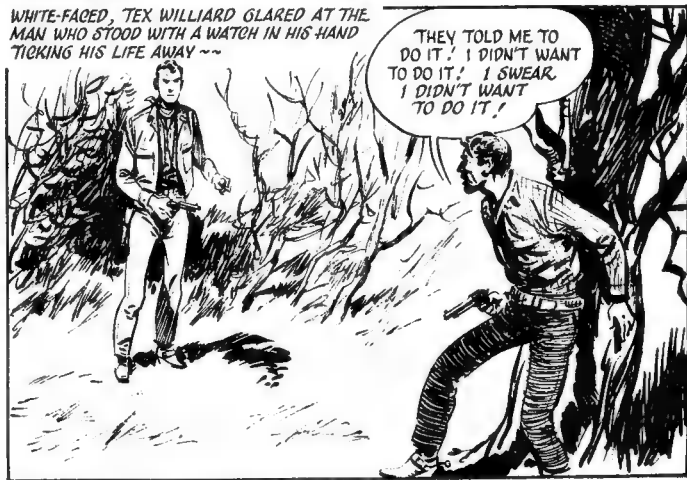


TEX WILLIARD, FEAR CONTORTING HIS FACE, REMAINED SILENT. THE ORPHAN REGARDED HIM CLOSELY, THEN SUDDENLY INTO HIS MIND CAME A PICTURE OF TEX WILLIARD AFTER THE ATTACK ON BILL HOWLAND, STANDING WITH A MANILLA ROPE HELD LOOSELY IN HIS HAND. ANOTHER PICTURE FLASHED INTO THE ORPHAN'S MIND--FROM HIS BOYHOOD--OF THREE MEN RIDING BY NIGHT ON THE GRIDIRON RANGE AND A MAN'S FACE SEEN IN THE MOONLIGHT.





WHITE-FACED, TEX WILLIARD GLARED AT THE MAN WHO STOOD WITH A WATCH IN HIS HAND TICKING HIS LIFE AWAY ~~

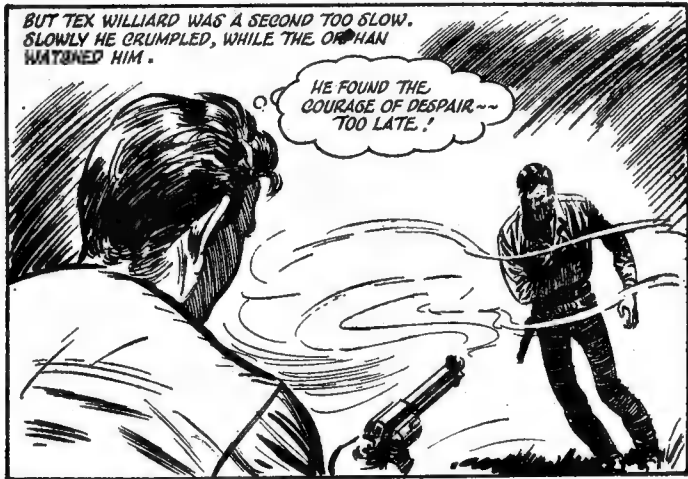


HIS CRIES FOR MERCY GABBLED AWAY INTO A MEANINGLESS JUMBLE OF SOUNDS. HE STARED AT THE BLACK MUZZLE OF THE COLT, FROZEN BY TERROR, FASCINATED BY HORROR AND DEADENED BY DESPAIR. THEN-- SUDDENLY HIS OWN GUN LEAPED UP--



BUT TEX WILLIARD WAS A SECOND TOO SLOW. SLOWLY HE CRUMPLED, WHILE THE ORPHAN WATCHED HIM.

HE FOUND THE  
COURAGE OF DESPAIR--  
TOO LATE.!



THEN SLOWLY THE ORPHAN HOLSTERED HIS GUN AND STOOD FOR A MOMENT LIMPLY WITH BOWED HEAD.

WELL--  
I'M GLAD  
HE DIED  
GAME!



THEN THE ORPHAN TURNED AND WALKED AWAY--- AND AS HE DID SO, HE CRIED OUT IN DESPAIR--

HELEN!  
HELEN--  
FORGIVE ME!



THAT EVENING IN FORD'S STATION WHILE THE DUSK DEEPEDED AND LIGHTS SPRANG UP IN THE TOWN, HELEN SHIELDS WAS LAYING THE TABLE FOR DINNER, WHEN SHE HEARD THE RAPID TATTOO OF GALLOPING HOOFES ~~

ONLY A COWBOY  
WOULD RIDE LIKE THAT.  
I WONDER ~~  
I WONDER ~~ IS IT  
THE ORPHAN ?



THE ORPHAN CAME INTO TOWN, RIDING FAST, RIDING UNSEEINGLY, HIS MIND DEAD, DESPAIR IN HIS HEART, FOR HE HAD BROKEN HIS PROMISE AND KILLED ANOTHER MAN ~~





AND THEN THE ORPHAN FLUNG THE DOOR OPEN AND ~~STOOD~~ <sup>STOOD</sup> THERE  
FACING HELEN~~ HIS FACE TERRIBLE TO SEE.

HELEN~~  
HELEN~~  
I HAVE BROKEN  
MY WORD!

SLOWLY THE GIRL WENT TO HIM~~

I HAVE KILLED  
A MAN!

YOU DID NOT~~ YOU  
DID NOT SHOOT HIM  
WITHOUT WARNING.  
I KNOW YOU  
DIDN'T~~

NO~~  
NOT THAT!  
I GAVE HIM A  
CHANCE FOR  
HIS LIFE!

SLOWLY, GRIMLY, THE ORPHAN TOLD HELEN THE STORY OF TEX WILLIARD. SHE MOVED TO A CHAIR, AND SAT DOWN AND HE KNELT BESIDE HER.

I SHOT HIM!  
HE KILLED MY FATHER!  
HELEN, CAN YOU  
FORGIVE ME?

DON'T! DON'T! I AM SURE  
YOU HAVE DONE NO WRONG--  
AND IF YOU HAVE--  
DON'T YOU KNOW  
I LOVE YOU?

AND THEN THE ORPHAN ROSE TO  
HIS FEET AND DREW HER TO HIM--

HELEN! YOU LOVE ME!  
HOW LONG MUST I WAIT  
UNTIL WE ARE  
MARRIED?

I LOVE YOU.  
I WILL BE YOUR  
WIFE WHENEVER  
YOU WANT ME TO,  
MY DEAR!

THEY HEARD NO SOUND IN  
THE HOUSE. THEY DID NOT  
KNOW THAT MRS SHIELDS  
AND MARY AND GRACE RITCHIE  
HAD COME IN AND SEEN THEM,  
AND TIPTOED OUT AGAIN--  
THE ORPHAN'S LONG QUEST  
WAS OVER, AND HE HAD  
FOUND THE GREAT HAPPINESS.

*The End*

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